ANTONY GORMLEY

INTERVIEW WITH ARABELLA NATALINI

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Arabella Natalini: Reading or listening to an artist's words is a desire often shared by scholars, insiders and the public, who regularly seek out captions and explanations prior to even having encountered a work. Although this need for direction is legitimate and comprehensible, I do wonder whether it is a symptom of a failure of contemporary art, validating a passive attitude in front of it, allowing us to avoid activating our own imagination and thoughts. However, I believe that things are more complicated, and while on the one hand your work is so telling that doesn't require further explanation, on the other, I think it would be useful to discuss your position concerning what you are making. My impression is that you are extremely involved in your work and at the same time, capable of taking a detached view of the creative process. How would you assess the relationship between your works and your words? Do you actually feel the need to express yourself further, or is this something that you simply do, surrendering to the endless invitations to speak about your work?

Antony Gormley: I have always agreed to talk not because I think that talking is necessary or a prerequisite for the understanding of the work but it can illuminate approaches and fundamental assumptions: the challenges of and responsibility to the inspirations of making. Unlike painting, sculpture does not require walls and the shelter of a roof in order to do its work, and of all of the visual arts, sculpture engages a collective response in collective space. So sculpture, of its nature and particularly when in nature, invades collective space. If you are responsible for putting a work in the desert, by the sea, or on the roofs of New York, people have a legitimate reason to ask what your basis for doing so is. I accept and wish to examine the social responsibility of sculpture.

Apart from all of those issues, the thought structure of art is a tool and, as one might go into the workshop of a violin maker and understand the nature of the instrument through looking at the workbench at which these instruments are made, so examining the conceptual structure out of which a work arises is not a bad thing to do - not just for the public but also for me. As we have started this conversation before I have begun installing the work, the exhibition may be improved because I may sharpen my understanding of the challenges.

Of course this whole ekphrasis issue, of narration and reflection on a work, can be dismissed by phrases such as 'if I could explain it, I wouldn't need to make it'. I want to make it very clear that I do not do interviews to explain what it is that people might be looking at. The works I make come from an urgency that is beyond my control. In many ways the works dictate themselves, every work being the mother of the subsequent one. They dictate how they should be made and my assistants and I are slaves to the works determinism. It is true that invention favours the well-prepared mind. I think that both the intellectual structure out of which a project comes, as well as the physical condition of the studio in which it is made, are the two poles by which work of clarity comes and both are worthy of examination. Brancusi said something like 'things are not difficult to make; what is difficult is putting ourselves in the state of mind to make them'. I believe that. The integration in the last years of digital imaging, model making, engineering and computing, along with the training of a group of creative individuals at the studio with a common aim to develop and push the varied languages of sculpture, has been an essential instrument in my work.

None of this explains the work - art is an open place, it is a place in which even I, as the maker, can enter an open place of interpretation. The work, when made, is simply there and the degree to which the work, in its silence and stillness, invites us to project onto it the thoughts and feelings relevant to that moment in our lives, is one of its major functions. The stillness and silence of sculpture is a foil against which the changing climate of our feelings and rational consciousness find a resonator.
All art, but particularly sculpture, is a proposition: 'can we look at things this way?' To work, the proposition has to be in good shape. Every exhibition that uses works that have maybe never been exhibited together before, investigates the world of the work. You could say that sculpture is the most resilient, the most obtuse in its haughty detachment from the world. But I feel that the new function of sculpture, discovered through the phenomenological works of America in the early 1960s and 1970s, opened up a whole new field for sculpture as a catalyst for looking at things in which the world itself became part of the material and subject. The home truths: context is half of the work, the viewer doing half of the work - part Duchampian and part phenomenological - come from those experiments by Robert Smithson, Richard Serra and Walter De Maria etc., where sculpture is used as a form of place-making that could be freely occupied by the mind and body of the viewer, and which the viewer's perceptions of the world were qualified, framed and given colour by the existence of the work. This is a radical idea, a reversal of figure-ground relation and the releasing of the subject from representation to reflexivity, and the possibility of an open-ended immersion in first-hand experience out of which art can emerge.

AN: I would like to ask you about the specificity of making a new show at the Forte di Belvedere. How did you relate to this place configured as an artefact that dominated the town of Florence from the end of the 16th century - a fortress, never used as such, but built in response to a historical situation which saw the power of the Medici family menaced by external and internal fronts? And how would you describe your responsibility towards visitors, and those from Florence in particular?

AG: This building, connected to the Boboli, to the Pitti Palace and Palazzo Vecchio, is a very obvious statement of control as much as of defence. As you say, it was never the site of war and never needed to be defended, so in some senses it has an emblematic function, the suggestion that you should feel through its presence the protection of (but also the overseeing power of) the family that caused it to be made. It is located in Oltrarno, across the water, and watches the city that it controls but is also fearful of. The iconic building is the medium by which architecture flexes its muscles these days so an historic example of an emblematic architecture is of interest to me. In the history of the battles between Florence, Siena and Pisa, the need to express power and wealth took two forms: art and war, and the Medici funded both. As in Peter the Great's New Amsterdam in St Petersburg, a huge amount of effort goes into this type of architecture and I want people to feel it: to walk around this re-shaped hill, the transformation of geology into artefact, and feel the power and the paranoia.

My responsibility to the Florentine citizen is for this building to become as open as possible and engage every person, from child to older person, in some kind of imaginative exploration. Here is a place that was given by the army to the city at the end of the 1950s and that is now erased of its military history but it is a good place to think about the human story and the motivations that energise it.

AN: Starting from this place, from its symbolic value and its architecture so marked by its proportions, you decided to realise a project with over one hundred life-size human figures. Scale is something that has always interested you, something that you master, moving from small 'objects' to architectonic dimensions, always maintaining as a starting point the human scale, even when you go 'large'. Why is the work life-size?

AG: I think that the critical thing here was to sense the scale, mass and relationship of the built spaces of the Forte to our bodies. From it, the view onto the buildings of the city are seen as a panorama just like those in some of the frescoes in the Signoria. I wanted the sculpture to re-enforce our human scale on its lateral terraces in relation to these distances and distant habitats of the city, while being conscious of the scale of the Forte itself. I hope that some of the power of its architecture has transferred from the building to my made bodies. I have tried to transfer tectonic masses to the body and I am hoping that people will feel this on an intimate level.

AN: You often refer to architecture as an expansion of the body. Speaking about the distribution of your figures, of their attentive and judicial placement in the extensive grounds of the Belvedere, you employ the term 'acupuncture'. In what sense is it acupuncture? Do you intercept neuralgic points to heal a 'dead' artefact (emptied of its functions) to give back to it a new vital energy?

AG: I use the word acupuncture in the sense of revitalising the clogged energy of a site. Here is a place that can now be seen as an artefact in the manner of a pyramid, labyrinth or catacomb, at the intersection of geology and human ingenuity. It can help us tune into our own body-response to a particular built habitat. I consider all architecture as the second body. The decision not to use this as a platform on which to make a monumental intervention was simply to treat the Forte itself as worthy of exploration. Acupuncture refers to activating the closed and open zones of the Forte but also the somatic response of the viewer.

AN: The deep interest you have in each individual, in humankind and its place in the world, is here underscored even in the title of the exhibition itself, HUMAN. In this 'occupation' of the fortress by 'humans' - human forms presented in a variety of situations and predicaments - a projection of the diversity of humanity materialises. I would say that you do not re-propose a sort of humanism in the classic sense of the word but rather an artistic, historical-anthropological exploration of human variety and states - from glory to abjection, from wonder for the world to grief and anguish. I would hypothesize that the meaning of 'human' for you is not necessarily normative but maybe more purely descriptive, a 'description' that raises questions...

AG: Your basic proposition is correct. I do not describe diversity but I relish and celebrate it. I am interested in exploring what it means to be in possession of a precious human birth: a mind in a place called the body - a place that is connected to other places.

AN: At the beginning of our conversation you said that 'every exhibition using works that have probably never been previously exhibited together investigates the world of the work'. Is this the case with HUMAN? Here you show human figures in different formalisations: the more 'naturalistic' CRITICAL MASS series and the so-called 'Blockworks' and 'Cube Works' series, sometimes so geometrical that they approach abstraction. Are these configurations connected with different visions of the human or are they just two aspects of your own stylistic repertoire?

AG: There is no style in my work, or at least not one that I have consciously invented. I do not put much hope in style. The way that something is done, is usually the outcome of the necessary muscles and equipment gathered along the way of realisation. The evolution of the language that I use to describe a human space in space has entirely resulted from the demands the work has made of me as it has progressed.

AN: From a formal point of view, the two series of sculptures shown in the exhibition are immediately distinguishable: one is not only more naturalistic than the other but, as the visitors get closer, they gradually notice that the respective textures of each series are different, due to the different processes of production. While the CRITICAL MASS figures, made using a mould of your own body, have been produced in series (each of the twelve positions has been cast five times), the 'Blockworks' are made singularly, starting from a process of digitization. It is as if you created figures that constitute a corporeal alphabet to write different sentences each time, depending on their positions. What is, for you, the sense of repetition? How do the repeated figures stand in relation to the 'singular' ones?

AG: CRITICAL MASS attempts to isolate twelve basic body positions that everyone can empathise with and this work includes several sculptures that are readily readable as positions in the sequence of prayer or meditation. But that was not the point - it was to present this basic lexicon and then show how these same positions, when embedded in a sculpture that takes its object status seriously, can evoke very different emotions according to their orientation. This was the proposition of those works on the lower terrace, to show the CRITICAL MASS pieces in their original orientation, and fallen, and inverted. The piece was cast from twelve original polyester and fibreglass patterns. This enabled the multiplication and therefore the ability to play the game with the orientations. The one with the bent head shows the greatest difference when inverted: from a mourning figure to a playful acrobat. The 'Blockworks' are made in series but are unique; each betrays slight variations of adjustment and are singular. Some of the CRITICAL MASS positions have been used to make some 'Blockworks': I have inverted a 'Blockwork' version of the one in a bent head pose and placed it in the line of three 'Blockworks' positioned on the horizon. I think that broadly speaking, evolution in the work has been towards greater abstraction; a simplification of form but loosening of body posture; moving away from the symmetrical towards the unstable. This is nowhere more clear than in the two 'crashed' cube works in the loggia and the two lying figures in a room in the palazzina.

AN: Writing about this particular show, you stated, 'the dialectic between aspirational and abject is the tension that runs throughout the exhibition'. How do these different formalisations contribute to clarify this tension, and the world of the work?

AG: The language of architecture, when transferred to the evocation or provocation of emotion, for me, allows literal instability to signify emotional instability. When we use words like 'I am falling apart', an objective correlative would be a building that is cracking up. Human society has evolved complex structures. The idea of architecture is to provide stable environments but when we look at images of the city of Kobe post-earthquake, or of Homs post-conflict, we become very aware of how easily damaged and unstable these environments are. The wounds in the body of the city, whether Baghdad or New York, have become the material evidence of human suffering. The formalism of Cubism is not enough.

AN: Besides the two nuclei of CRITICAL MASS - the pile of bodies and the ascending diagonal - the site is populated by others figures that, isolated or in small groups, inhabit all the spaces of the Forte. Could you tell us how you make decisions on the placement of works and maybe give some specific examples, such as the one seated on the external wall?

AG: If the context is half the work, in this case, it may be more. The work catalyses the psychology inherent in all structures of the human habitat and nowhere is that more clear than in the defensive architecture of the Forte. Some of the bodyforms use the nature of the space itself: for example, a CRITICAL MASS sculpture cries against the inner wall of the upper terrace. Some try to contradict the space: the placement of the seated figure that

sits atop the wall above the entrance is a way of detoxifying or playfully undermining the authority of the architecture - as when people sit on top of a sea wall with their legs swinging. For each location I have introduced a form that uses either the prospect or the sense of enclosure to evoke the underlying feel of a place. At the core of the exhibition is a sculpture that is elevated but it is not a plinth, it is simply on a cube: this reminds us of the isolation of the body and the indignities to which the human body was put in this place of torture (see opposite). The figure lying in the entrance tunnel at the eastern side of the site is a familiar sight for those of us who live in the city who have seen bodies sheltering in the interstices of collective space: the fronts of banks, the vents of the underground, the underpasses of our inner cities. Fall-out in terms of material destruction is mirrored in the social fallout where bodies literally have not found a place. But they are not all sad! Some are just playful like the one head-butting the corner of the Palazzina or the one sunbathing against its wall. As well as making a relationship between the sculptures and their immediate context, I have also associated pieces from CRITICAL MASS with a 'Blockwork' that takes the same basic body structure. It allows us to see the development of this tectonic language.

AN: I would also like to discuss some of the other positions, such as the two sculptures placed at the entrances. These are crouched, curled up figures that seem to wish to induce a particular emotional tone. Is it an invitation for reflection for those who cross the threshold of the exhibition? Is this emotional tone the one with which you wish to frame the other emotions that you mentioned - a playful attitude, fear, the joy of sunbathing, etc...?

AG: I see the two entrances as important: they are the initial confrontation prior to the evolution of a particular narrative peculiar to each person's motion through the installation. I have placed the two crouching pieces (piece 3 from the CRITICAL MASS sequence) at both the north entrance and the east entrance and, as you suggest, they are derived from my affection for the Egyptian scribe figure: the position of one who chooses not to act in order to witness. Immediately subsequent, the works are fallen and then seated high on the wall at both entrances. Those seated high up look out to the horizon that the viewer cannot see: another form of witness. The work interrogates its context to make the feeling more present in tight or open spaces, and maybe encourages the participant viewer to attend to their own spatial experience. I am loath to characterise the range of emotional content but hopefully it ranges from the tragic to the ecstatic.

AN: You worked for many years using your body as a starting point and as a tool. I think of your figures in lead, or in iron - forms that are both born out of the process of casting by hand. But there are also other works, such as those made of bread, where the human figure, or rather, the traces of its absence, had been excavated (eaten) into the bread. And also other works, such as ROOM (1980), where you created a space of encounter with your clothes, or of the different versions of FIELD (1989-2003), with a multitude of small figures in terracotta moulded by the hands of the community that had shaped them... Although iron (and its industrial features) seems predominant in your work, over the years you have used different techniques and materials. What are the characteristics intrinsic to material that prompt you to employ it?

AG: Iron is a concentrated earth material. It is the mineral that gives us our gravitational weight, gives us our trajectory through space and our magnetic field. It also happens to be a common industrial material providing the skeleton to most of our habitats, to the extent that it is a common and regularly employed part of our daily lives. Iron, for me, escapes from the history of fine art with which bronze is associated, and gives a very purposeful identity to the work. It integrates both with the elements and with architecture. It is familiar to us within the built environment, often fulfilling pragmatic functions, so it is an interesting material to use for imaginative instruments.

AN: Lately you have been using increasingly advanced computer technology at the studio and, although maintaining the body as subject and primal agent of your work, your studio has in time hosted a growing number of computers and people able to use this software. All this, you have previously said, is an 'essential instrument' of your work. You once referred to the computer technology as an 'extraordinary extension of our thinking but also a prison...' I often wonder where the threshold between the opening of expanded possibilities and getting trapped by the endless possibilities of the virtual lies. What are your thoughts about this?

AG: Computers give us an ability to find building solutions which can be analysed and evaluated prior to making that was never possible before. Body scanning has allowed me to map the zones of the body in a freer way than plaster moulding. Digital software allows me to compute individual blocks that simplify but carry the weight and mass equivalent to a particular body zone and their mutual relationship can be expressive in a way that was not possible before. This ability to both design and evaluate prior to making and then to be able to make models in wood, polystyrene, or printed, and to test out possible constructions, is a huge liberation. The 43 'Blockworks' that complement CRITICAL MASS are all derived from a software programme specially written for the studio and it has allowed the work to develop. The danger is an addiction to the illusory agency of the virtual. The challenge is to use the virtual to make things better in the material world.

AN: Being less interested in representation than in giving opportunities to make experiences, you create places, spaces that offer visitors a direct and personal encounter with your work and with themselves. Today there is much talk about interactivity and immersion but this search for immediate (and often uncritical and captivating) participation runs the risk of creating theme parks, where reality is not enriched and revealed by the artworks, but substituted by an illusory world, a virtual reality. Where is the threshold between these two dimensions? How is it possible to create works that are immersive and engaging but not regressively illusory?

AG: I would be very worried if the spectacle nature of my work at the Forte outweighs it reflexive nature. What do I mean by reflexive? Something that invites us to confront our own experience rather than providing a visual feast to be consumed. The work resists image consumption. These are not the likenesses of things that we like! They interrogate time as it happens and the place in which they are placed. This is the absolute opposite of art as escapism and it offers no alternative world.

AN: You work prompts an invitation to experiment with oneself. There is an activation of the visitors' discretion and capability, an activation of imagination that fosters the adoption of a position that encourages physical and mental participation. The feeling is that each of us is called personally to 'take a stance'. When you are working do you ever think about the reactions that people will have once they encounter your work?

AG: No, I can't. You are kind to affirm my central proposition that the work invites a certain kind of self-reflection but I am not sure that many people necessarily respond to that invitation. The work comes from the work itself. The motivation is to try to understand my own experience of being in the world. The degree to which that is of interest is the degree to which the work calls on us effectively to inhabit its space but I cannot take account of that. The truth I seek is in the un-knowing of my own experience. The work is the result of trying to make instruments in which I can know my unknowing better.

AN: Your last assertion is very suggestive. At other times you have spoken about your figures as 'foils', a contrasting medium for images, reflections

and feelings to emerge. Is the visitor's labour of imagination something that contributes to the elaboration of this condition of unknowing?

AG: I just think that there are certain things that can only be expressed materially. The body is our most sensitive instrument but we attend to its being infrequently and without bare attention. This foundation is non-hermeneutic, deep understanding. I am attempting to encourage people to attend to their embodied selves through the work. This is the absolute opposite of the instantly transmitted and instantly forgotten digital world of images.

AN: The disposition of your figures creates original relationships but also an incisive picture in its entirety. It seems to me that HUMAN, besides its being an exhibition that gathers 103 sculptures together, could also be read as a single large installation that comprehends the figures, the space of the Forte but also the air, the light and the atmospheric variations that run through it. The result is surprising and I am wondering whether the final effect corresponds exactly to what you had imagined while working on the project, or whether it surprised you as well.

AG: Yes, it did surprise me - that sense of crystallisation and the way in which darkness and light became such an important part of the feel of the show. I had not really considered it so carefully before and it came as a result of working in and with the spaces. The careful making of a model of the Forte allowed me to think about the distribution of the work very well and actually there were only four works moved from their original positions on site. Having said that, I think that the thing that surprised me was how much the work and the site really locked together. This provided endless and unexpected sequences of revelation, for example as you walk up from the Boboli entrance you are made aware of more work consistently engaging with horizons: you see the crouching work facing you as you come up, you turn to the right and there is the fallen work on its side that you see against the sky, you then progress through the tunnel and the first work in the sequence of CRITICAL MASS becomes available to view on the left, as well as the seated work to the right on the wall.

One work builds upon another. The thing that pleased me was how you could connect the experience of one part of the installation with another, for instance, the work looking out towards the campagna through the window of the room worked with the piece in the corner.

AN: The presence of the public en masse changes the reading of the exhibition radically, hiding, in stops and starts, the overall aspect but it accentuates a sort of 'discovery effect'. It might become more difficult to read the general plan while the single sculptures appear and disappear according to the movement of the visitors. A further effect of the use of life-size figures is therefore a sort of confusion between the living people and the statues. Which of the two possibilities of reading do you personally prefer?

AG: The way in which the public become part of the installation was part of the original intention and indeed why it was so important the Forte was open and free to access for the public. To watch the dispersion of moving bodies across the fields of the newly clarified terraces from the upper terrace is very much part of the engagement with the piece. The work functions in exactly the same way that the walking figures of visitors to the piece INSIDE AUSTRALIA (2002-03) become part of the work - the viewers becoming part of the viewed. Here, the way in which the geometries of the dense mass against light backgrounds become complicated or enriched by the unpredictable movement of people moving across the field, is essential to the understanding of the work. As the weather and light conditions change, so the number of visitors and the time of the day will change. This registration of human engagement, with the reflexive use of this space transformed through the infection of the sculpture, is the concept of the show.

The dialogue between seeing the work when the Forte is very busy, or seeing it in the privileged position of a lone visitor very early in the morning, the experience of watching the interrelationship of moving and conscious humans in relation to these silent still presences, is a qualification and enriching of the experience of the sole visitor, experiencing the site alone, is the point.

AN: The dialectic between stillness and movement that ensues from the visitor's presence, is not only very interesting, but seems to emphasize an intrinsic aspect of your work. I think that this dialectic is more evident in the 'Blockworks', since the perception of their shape is more radically modified by the point of view of the observer.

AG: The evolution of the 'Blockworks' comes entirely out of a slow progression: from the desire to make physical equivalents of a pixelated image to the understanding that the relationship between abstract geometric blocks could begin to carry feeling in their own right. I realised that the language of Modernism could be used to recover affect just as well as the engagement with the body itself. This is a pretty radical shift in the work but what it demands is that the circumnavigation of the 'Blockworks', their junctions and disjunctions, require a kind of assembly of feeling and projection from the viewer that the CRITICAL MASS figures require only in connection one with the other. The translation of body posture into these precarious stacked blocks that have their own logic and illogicality, I think, engages a sort of sympathy and memory almost of the child playing with stacks of wooden blocks or Lego, a kind of memory of putting things together in a playful and indeterminate way which I think helps the viewer not to take these things as simple abstract propositions.

AN: Your curiosity and your endless research make me think that you are open to suggestions coming from the people working with you but, on the other hand, you are always in strict control of every detail of your work. What is your attitude in this respect?

AG: I work with many hands and many minds. I want my assistants to be with me and with the work body, mind and soul. To that degree there is latitude, when I feel that I can give an assistant my full trust, they have my full trust. The studio rule is if you can think of any way of making the work that you have been asked to do better - then do it. This results in radical changes and initiations of new avenues of research. I think that the progress of the work is in the hands of the work and we are all - myself and all my assistants - engaged in trying to listen to what it is trying to say to us in order to make the next work as good as it can be. In that work we welcome intentional and unintentional avenues of exploration.

AN: Many people remark upon the traces of the making that you do care not to cancel: the 'buttons' of CRITICAL MASS, the texture of the 'lost-polystyrene' process on the 'Blockworks'. Why is it important for you to keep the traces of the production process?

AG: I think that the works should be readable in terms of the history of their own making. I am not interested in a highly polished finish. I think that, in the same way that layering strata helps you to understand the fossil, a record of these traces of the industrial processes are critical to me and betray the fact that these things are made after a 300-year exploitation of the second law of thermodynamics.

AN: How does a process-driven approach to sculpture interact with a necessary dialogue with tradition when you decide to evoke the body?

AG: I am aware that the body has been in art almost as long as it has been conscious. Human beings have found it necessary to remake the body for themselves in order to understand it as object and as a place amongst places. My strategy is indexical: these are industrially made fossils. They are traces of a real body, moulded or scanned and then built; forensic and evidential rather than expressive. I have tried to rethink the body in terms of survival rather than how it might mirror life. I want the works to celebrate the basic body postures and they call on us to fill those positions with our own experience. They lack what we have: freedom of thought and bodily movement, expression of joy or fear, all the exercising of free will ... and they wait for us as a trap waits, for our thoughts and feelings. These objects will continue to wait and I don't know what they will do or say to an audience which has not been born yet.

AN: Your gaze seems directed to the future, and you are extremely attentive to, and aware of, the destiny of our planet, but at the same time you are interested in memory, history and the history of art. Although your work, being somehow figurative, could be located in the tradition of classical sculpture, it also has deep roots in the main experiences of the 1960s and 70s. Working now, in Florence, the comparison to Humanism and Renaissance culture seems inevitable and, even if you recently said that you contest the proportional ideals, you admit that among your heroes there is Giambologna, and you also often refer to Michelangelo's SPINARIO. How do you reconcile the admiration for traditional sculpture, which is representational and imbued with humanistic ideals, with your refusal of both representation and the anthropocentric ideals of mastering nature and history?

AG: I am very intensely aware of the failure of Humanism. In the struggles of Michelangelo you can see the very thing we were just talking about in his understanding and analysis of his own experience, inner nature and its dark side. Michelangelo had the ability to make ideal form as an inheritor of the language of Phidias or Praxiteles, and at the same time, in the RONDANINI PIETÀ and in the late crucifixion drawings, there is a profound understanding of entropy and the acknowledgment of the failure of the human spirit to fulfill its own promise. In the work of Tino di Camaino or early Donatello there is a profound understanding of the inherent vulnerability of the human. In those works I find a reflexive honesty. I reject the hubris of any system that purports to encompass some ideal, some absolute. There is only subjective truth. We are past Hegel: all grand schemes fail. This is the time we are living in, the return to subjectivity is our pain but also our freedom.

AN: In the 'Paragone' among the arts, sculpture has always been considered secondary in comparison to painting, due to its strongly 'material nature'. Nonetheless, its nature is complex and, sometimes, unfathomable. In 1995, W. J. T. Mitchell wrote in his essay introducing your work that 'after architecture, sculpture is the most ancient, conservative, and intractable of the media'. What do you think about this statement? What is sculpture good for anyway?

AG: In a time of the instant and ubiquitous production of images which gratify a sense of self-existence but are instantly obsolete, sculpture can re-affirm first-hand experience. Sculpture is good for reminding us of our dependency, provisionality and insufficiency, as well as being good for all the things that it was good for in the Renaissance: beauty, pride, sexuality, status. All of those latter possibilities are less significant than the greatest challenge facing our species, which asks where human nature fits into nature at a large.

AN: What does the term contemporary mean to you? Has it simply to do with being in our time or rather, as anticipated by Nietzsche, to be untimely, out-of-phase with our time?

AG: I think that we cannot be so immersed in our own production: cultural, intellectual or material, that we are unable to stand outside of it. History is the place that history is made. The present has to be born. The present is where we live. In the present we make a future out of the past.